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Ad astra per aspera

Throughout life, people have both good and bad experiences. It would be tempting to strive for a painless, care-free existence, with no suffering at all. Yet the adversities that people face in their lives are the points that most characterize who they are and shape who they will become. Without failure, sorrow, and pain, one cannot truly appreciate how wonderful life is. When approached as opportunities for learning, self discovery, and growth, bad moments can define and transform lives in many positive ways.

The difference between knowledge and wisdom is that wisdom requires experience. Experience is earned through taking chances, making mistakes. It is those mistakes and failures that most drive the lessons learned. As said by Thomas Edison, “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” Steve Jobs was unceremoniously fired at Apple in 1985 only to return in 1996 and build Apple up to the powerhouse it is today. These men learned from their mistakes and became famous for their success.

People often come together in times of crisis. When under great stress, people can learn many things about themselves, discovering talents that they did not know they had possessed. Natural and man-made disasters such as floods, blizzards, hurricanes, war, and the terrorism of 9/11 have led to both legendary and unknown heroics. It is not just at the time of the tragedy that one’s character is tested. Loved ones see the true nature of friendship in the aftermath of death, divorce, job loss, and disease. Such tragedies can bring people closer together as they find ways to pick up the pieces.

Struggling to succeed is an important part of life. One cannot know what one is truly capable of if challenging situations are never experienced. When being successful, one appreciates the more difficult struggle rather than what comes easily. I have regularly received A’s in Science, but usually felt the homework assignments and projects were achievable without extraordinary effort. Recently in Physics I had to complete a very difficult lab report which I had labored over for a week, worrying that it was not good enough. When I received the grade for it and discovered that I got an A, I jumped and shouted for joy. That week of suffering made the feeling of passing even better.

The challenges that life brings can be hard to bear. It is not always evident in the midst of tragedy that there may be a silver lining. By stopping and looking around, one may see a friend there eager to help. Finding one’s inner strength in a crisis is the true test of character. The wisdom gained from these experiences will last a lifetime. Overcoming adversity makes life’s victories taste that much sweeter.